

the culture of a particular people living at a definite time and place. As such it reflects in its subject matter, *i.e.*, chiefly vocabulary, many of the non-linguistic elements of that culture. Its association with a definite tribe or group of tribes often enables us to make valuable inferences as to earlier distributions and movements of population, while its mirroring of culture is obviously of great assistance in the securing of a perspective for the culture itself. In the second place, language, like culture, is a composite of elements of very different age, some of its features reaching back into the mists of an impenetrable past, others being the product of a development or need of yesterday. If now we succeed in putting the changing face of culture into relation with the changing face of language, we shall have obtained a measure, vague or precise according to specific circumstances, of the relative ages of the culture elements. In this way language gives us a sort of stratified matrix to work in for the purpose of unravelling culture sequences; its relation to culture history may be roughly compared—one should not press the analogy—to that of geology to palæontology. How linguistic perspective is obtained, how linguistic features or elements are assigned to a relatively late or early period, how they may be reconstructed to earlier forms we can not undertake to demonstrate here,¹ as these problems are far beyond the scope of the present paper. We must here assume these results as possible of achievement and limit ourselves to a consideration of how they are to be utilized for cultural reconstruction.

In three important respects language, as an instrument for reconstructing the past, has the advantage of culture. First of all, it forms a far more compact and inherently unified conceptual and formal complex than the totality of culture. This is due primarily to the fact that its function is far more limited in nature,² to some extent also to the fact that the disturbing force of rationalization that constantly shapes and distorts culture anew is largely absent in language. Any changes, then, that affect language are generally more consistently and regularly

¹ The general subject of time perspective in language, specifically in American languages, I hope some day to take up in a separate paper.

² The greater the specialization of function, the more neatly are the parts of a complex apt to be bound together and the finer the technique.